

The Athenian Mercury.

Saturday, November 9. 1695.

Quest. 1.

I Desire your Judgment concerning several propositions in a book not long since Printed.

1st. Whether or no, as the Author affirms, there be a Material Spirit, quatenus a Spirit.

Ans. The first and most natural notion which all mankind have of a Spirit, is, that 'tis not matter; or body, any more than black's white or Good's Evil. We speak of Spirit in the highest, and most noted sense of the word, tho' should it be borrow'd from corporeal beings, as we call the finest parts of matter, Spirit, Wind, &c. And *Animus*, *πνεύμα* and *Ruach*, in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, are understood with the same Latitude; yet nothing could be a meaner or more trivial fallacy, than to pretend to draw any argument from such an equivocal signification, and because something that's call'd Spirit is confessedly material, to pretend that all Spirit must be such. Just as fairly as one of his opinion might argue, That God himself was material, passive, nay and mortal, because the Holy Scripture calls Magistrates Gods, and at the same time says they shall die like men. Wherever then the word Spirit is taken for some finer part of matter, or it may be the modification, and motion of that matter by an higher agent, as in Brutes, there the very Terms themselves wherein 'tis express'd do acknowledge it material; but a reasonable Spirit, an Angel, or Soul of Man, either united to the body, or separate from that, and any other Vehicle, we deny to be material, nay that 'tis a contradiction in Terms that it should be so, which we hope we shall clearly prove, in answer to the next question.

Quest. 2. Whether or not his composuit of Adams Dust, p. 6. into Cognitive matter, be not highly absurd; unless he will grant, as he does p. 7. that the skill of a Divine Artist may as easily give man an immaterial Soul as make pure matter Cognitive.

Ans. Cognitive matter is just as good sense as material Spirit, one of which words destroys the other: and 'tis as repugnant or impossible for matter to think, as for Spirit to be without reflexion. Those who hold this absurdity may as well talk of a rational Looking-Glass, or a Cognitive Clock, which when its weights are down, is only a little more Cogitabund than ordinary. Tho' if we could see this wonderful material Spirit within, this matter and motion once regulate it self, and by its own inward sagacity, turn the Hand backwards or forwards, as it went too fast or slow, as we are sure we our selves have a principle within us, even prior to experience, and therefore, distinct from it, by which we correct the Errors of Sense, about Material Objects; then indeed there would be a little more temptation to adhere to their Notions, till when we must ask their pardons. But we suppose the objector argues further. If the skill of a Divine Artist can give man an immaterial Spirit, why mayn't it as well make pure matter Cognitive? We answer there's as wide a difference between these two as between Moses, changing a Rod into a Serpent, and the Popish Transubstantiation. The former of which works was indeed a mighty miracle, yet an Object of Divine Power, because it involv'd no contradiction: The latter a fowl lying wonder, contrary to the eternal nature of things, and one end of it pulling down the other. The most primary notion we can have of matter seems to be, that 'tis a Coagmentation of quantitative parts, separable and divisible, and both those parts and the whole Lump, of their own nature, purely passive; and the consequence seems to be fair from the reason of opposites, that Spirit cannot consist of any quantitative parts, nay, whatsoever may have been the particular opinion of some learned men,

cannot have any local extension, which seems to us to imply those parts, for if it is extended for example, in a square figure, towards East, West, North, and South, it must certainly have such distinct parts, as must answer to those four Quarters, and if it has such, how can it chuse but be body? And we are apt to think that those Gentlemen who have been of that opinion, were led aside by fixing their minds too intently on the Platonical Vehicle, which they think inseparable from the Soul, and which must be granted to be Body, made up, it's probable, from the purer or finer parts of the Animal Spirits, and carrying with it, after its separation from the grosser Organical Body, such a mould, or tendency, as it receiv'd while 'twas lodg'd in grosser matter, but still we can't think this essential to the Soul, since it may be, at least in thought, easily separated from it, and has existed actually separate, before 'twas ever immers'd in matter. We are also sure that 'tis of the nature of this Spirit to be Active, and its Action is thinking. Which we feel is perform'd by something within us, a principle, as before, distinct from matter, and correcting its errors, whereas this matter can no more think or reason, than our feet can see, or our Eyes walk. And it appears as incongruous to talk either of rational matter, or even of extended Spirit, as of a yard of sound, or the Colour of a thought. We have not here room for all the arguments which proves the Soul's immateriality, but some we shall insert. It has abstracted acts, can affirm and deny, it can form abstracted Notions, and even strip matter of its self in Demonstration, and Mathematical Universals, nay it has a clear and Demonstrable notion of an immaterial substance, therefore must be it self immaterial. We have a Root of Liberty, which nothing of matter can pretend to, which can't have to much motion, unless that of Gravitation, if that deserves the name. The Fancy, or Imagination, if suppos'd no more than the Corporeal fortuitous Imagining of things in the brain, can by no means Solve those *Alibons* which we are sure are perform'd by the Spirit within us. Fancy can never perceive that it perceives, because no Image of perception can be convey'd to the Imagination by Sense. Perception is not meer reaction of matter, but a recognition of those impressions which have been formerly made, a Flight much too high for matter. Nay, the body is a perfect statue or machine, without the actual operation and advenience of the Soul. Thus we appeal to any persons experience, whether they han't often lookt on a thing with their eyes wide open, nay read in a Book, and consequently heard what they both see and speak, yet if we do not attend to it, if the mind does not fix it self on the object immediately before it, but ranges and wanders somewhere else, we are still never the wiser; unless it starts, and as it were shakes it self into reflection, 'tis not conscious of those outward actions, it knows not what we read, or see, or hear.

It seems inconceivable that the prodigious number of Ideas rang'd in the memory, should be corporeal; if they were, where would there be room for 'em, or how could they but confound one another, as an infinite number of pictures in a Glass would do? Much less is the calling forth of any of these at pleasure, and ranging them in such admirable order, a work of chance or matter. Any more than a thousand Alphabets shook together, and then expos'd to a Looking-Glass, could by Virtue of the Glass immediately throw themselves into a Poem, or an Oration.

Two of the most plausible objections against the Immateriality of the Soul of man, seem to be those which are taken from the wonderful Actions of Brutes, whose Souls or principles of Action, are generally thought not to be immaterial. The other from children of

old men, whose Souls seem to grow and decay gradually, as they enter first upon Life, or are just leaving it. To the first of these there are who give a double answer, tho' exactly contrary one to the other. The first, that Brutes are perfect machines, so far from Reason that they are not sensible, the second that they have really rational and immaterial Souls (observe they all grant, if rational, then immaterial) which after the Death of the Body do either transmute, or are annihilated. Now if either of these hypotheses hold, the latter of which is embrac'd by some of our Society, then down falls the objection as soon as 'tis rais'd. But if both these ways of solving it should be thought still liable to new exceptions, and objections, there's yet a middle way left, and if either that or either of the extremes will hold, as sure one or other must be true, then their doubt is sufficiently answer'd; and that is of those who affirm that Brutes are neither destitute of sense, nor are their Actions guided by any internal principle distinct from matter, which we call reason, tho' they are by instinct, or a tendency to such and such Actions convenient to their natures, whereof they themselves are not conscious, stamp'd on their brains, and woven into their compositions by the great *Author* of the world. The difference is wide enough and plain enough between the actions of a Brute and a Man. The object only operates upon the Brute, without which he can do nothing, whereas there's something in a man after the object has operated upon him, which works again upon the object, tho' at never so great a distance. The object commands the Brute, the man the object, at least he may do so, and 'tis his own fault if he does not. Again, if Brutes may have some weak notion of singular sensible Good, 'tis certain they have none of what's general, rational, and divine, nor have they any notion of Truth, whatever they may have of Good, because the understanding is the judge of that, a power they want, and therefore can't be said to have reason in the same sense that man has, nor are their actions to be compar'd with humane actions. Tho' had they reason, we may very well believe they'd make better use on't, than to argue themselves into a lower species of being, or take as much pains to be rank'd among Vegetables, as some men do to prove there's no essential difference between themselves and the Beasts that perish.

As for the 2d question, from the dotage of Infancy and age, this does not seem to us any solid argument for the growth or decay of the Soul, and by consequence of its materiality. For how can we argue from such an accident to the substance, and how can the increase or loss of habits make any essential change in the subject of those habits? The good Angels increase in knowledge, for we can't suppose they desire to look into the Church in vain, and 'tis very likely the bad Angel did decrease in that by their Fall, as they entirely lost some other perfections, yet none will deny that the Essence of both rests still the same, and none but Heretics will affirm them to be material. Indeed here's a fowl mistake at the very bottom of this argument, and the fault is laid upon the Soul when 'tis plainly in the body. Whose indisposition renders it an unfit instrument for the Soul, and 'tis for God alone to work with any Instruments, or with such as are unproportionable to the effects he produces by them. The Soul acts not so vigorously in Infants, or old men, perhaps from the too great moisture of the one's Brain, and Dryness of the others, rendering them incapable of receiving, or retaining Images from their senses. Yet there's no doubt but even then, in that weak imperfect state of their Organs; Infants can exert such operations as prove they have a principle in 'em distinct from matter: They can chuse or refuse, affirm or deny, they soon correct their sentences, and argue from those little observations they have treasur'd up in their memories, and we find have notions of true and good, nay, they communicate these things to others, and express their minds by natural signs before they have learnt the Art of Words. And so when age or diseases render the body an unfit Habitation or Instrument for the Soul, will any be so fond to deny that there is still within, the same principles that there were from the beginning, or are in other men? If they do, they may as well affirm that a Dumb man has not the natural power of Speech and Reason, because his organs are indispos'd, and he cannot express his mind in the same manner with other men. To this, let 'em remember that the Soul sometimes exerts

it self, and acts, as we may say, beyond the power of the Body, as we see some mens minds are clearest and strongest when their bodies weak and low.

Quest. 3. Whereas he says, arguing against the Immateriality of the Soul, that he will submit to the Rules and Authority of the Scripture, I desire to know how his position, viz. "That the humane soul is a material Spirit, generated growing and falling with the Body, and rising again with it at the voice of the Archangel, how this can be said to agree with the Holy Scriptures, especially with that of St. Luk. 23. 43. "To day thou shalt be with me in paradise, exclusively to the other Malefactor?"

Ans. We doubt 'twou'd rather be a just than an uncharitable censure, that those persons who believe not the Immateriality of the Soul, have generally little more than a complimentary belief of the Holy Scriptures; our reason is because the Sadducees of old who were the first that deny'd it, did also deny an Inspiration, unless by the Book-Col. and consequently received all the Scriptures, except the Pentateuch, only, as the writings of good men, whence probably enough, our Saviour convinces 'em that the Dead shall rise, from the Pentateuch, not the Prophets; and by the way, his argument directly confronts the assertion of the new as well as all the old Sadducees. Gods says, he is not the God of the Dead, but of the Living, for all live unto him; those that are gone hence are not annihilated, but remain with God in Glory in the Land of the Living; but this not in their bodies which slept in the Graves, Abraham was dead and the Patriarchs: It follows, it must be in their Souls. Which therefore exist, after their bodies, and separated from them. There's another place, 12 Ecclesiast. "Then shall the dust return to the Earth from whence it came, and the Spirit return to God that gave it. If he gave it, and it returns to him, at the Death of the Body, while the Body returns to Dust, then certainly, it is not generated, nor grows with it, it does not fall with it, it is distinguish'd from it. Again the Scripture urg'd in the question, This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise. The sleepers wou'd avoid it by pretending 'tis false pointed in our Bibles and otherwise in antient Copies, which they say place the Comma at [this day] not at verily. But point or no point is not much to the purpose, because we know the antients were so far from using points that they had not so much as the distinction of words; and 'twou'd be but little comfort to the Malefactor that after their way of Interpretation, he should be happy none knows when, it may be ten thousand years after, and till then sunk into the Gulf of annihilation which nature so much abhors, and the wicked Thief, nay, Judas himself, be as happy as he for all that while. Besides, should their notion hold, that all man was mortal, and to be again reviv'd, how cou'd God be just? For if both Soul and Body, matter and Form be renewed, we shall be new men, other men, not the same with those who dy'd, the Soul being at least the nobler part, and these men agreeing that any part of matter joyn'd to the Soul makes the same man. But theres one Text more that surely grieves 'em, 2 Cor. 5. 6, 7. We are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord, that is, says the late Arch-Bishop. "while we are in these bodies we are detain'd from our happiness, as soon as ever we depart from them we shall have full possession of it. And the very first inference he draws from it is. "That this shews the absurdity of that opinion, or rather dream, concerning the sleep of the Soul from Death to the resurrection. Which if true, Death wou'd be but a cold comfort to good men, 'twou'd not be better to depart, they wou'd not be with Christ so much as those that liv'd, until the Resurrection, when all good men will be also with him.

Quest. 4. Whether by the contexture of the whole, he allows God himself to be an Immaterial Spirit?

Ans. We han't seen the piece, and can't make a Judgment, but if he's like his party, he must deny God to be immaterial, and like the Heathen, make him altogether such a one as himself. This is charg'd by grave authors on the old Sadducees, that they deny'd all immaterial substances, which they gather from that in the Acts, that they own neither Angel nor Spirit, except a material Spirit, like the present Gentleman, who if he interprets those two Texts in his own sense, God is a Spirit and the Father of Spirits, can scarce avoid publicly owning a material God.